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ABSTRACT

In response to accountability pressures over the past several years, a body of research attempting to identify characteristics of effective schools has developed. Efforts to improve school climate or evaluate teachers solely according to "effective school" characteristics may be misguided. One problem is that school effectiveness may be the result of productive student achievment, not the cause. (A similar misinterpretation of student achievement/self-concept correlates occurred in the 1960s.) Second, educational outcomes should properly be focused on the real school worker, the student. Also, the evaluation process is time-consuming and a compromise at best. This article proposes matching a given situation with one of four supervisory styles: clinical supervision, cooperative professional development, self-directed development, or administrative monitoring. Each style is applicable to one of four categories of teachers: the unfocused worker, the motivated but inexperienced teacher, the "jaded" teacher, and the competent teacher. Situational supervision, based on student achievement levels, takes into account not just the person supervised, but the task assigned. The process is consistent with the situational leadership concept developed by Kenneth Blanchard. Included are four references. (MLH)

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SITUATIONAL SUPERVISION

OR

STUDENT PERFORMANCE BASED TEACHER SUPERVISION

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SITUATIONAL SUPERVISION

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STUDENT PERFORMANCE BASED TEACHER SUPERVISION

One of the areas of almost constant conflict in public education has been the concept of accountability. School administrators have felt the pressure from school patrons for specifying responsibility for successful student learning on one hand. On the other hand, teachers and teacher organizations have demanded greater teacher autonomy in the classroom. When the principal visits the classroom, is it to supervise or evaluate?

For the past several years a series of studies collectively identified as "school effectiveness studies" have identified characteristics of schools that seem to differentiate effective from ineffective schools. Educators assumed, perhaps too quickly, that these correlates were casual. Two significant developments resulted. Workshops to teach teachers how to use "Time on task," or how to improve school climate are typical examples of one development. The other development has been to focus the teacher, principal or supervisor interactions on recording the degree to which teachers exhibit these "effective school" characteristics.

Supervisory or evaluative visits to the classroom began to focus upon how well the teachers performed in the use of time, questioning technique and other observable teacher actions. There may be some real problems with this approach. The first is that the distinguishing characteristics of effective schools may be the result of productive student achievement rather than the cause.

We have made this same kind of mistake in the past. During the "silly sixties" researchers observed that students who had a good self-concept were also students who were achieving well in school. This was followed by a multitude of programs aimed at improving student self-confidence. "If we can just get the student to feel good about himself, we can then begin to teach him something." Educators were not unique in the misinterpretation of the comparative studies.

In the business world we observed programs such as sensitivity training to help workers improve their self-image. The slogan, "The worker (student) who feels good about himself will do good work," (have improved achievement).

It is only in recent years that we have come to recognize that the reverse is true. Workers (students) who do good work (are achieving well) feel good about themselves. The focus in business, at least, has more recently been upon helping workers be more productive through teaching them skills and providing positive feedback. As a result, the worker has become more competent and more committed to the work. We should examine this premise carefully to see how it applies to school learning.

A second problem in applying the effective school research is that educators have often failed to remember what the outcome of education should be on who the counterparts of workers in industry really are. The outcome of schooling must be assessed in terms of student learning and the "worker" in schools is the student, not the teacher. In spite of the efforts of some teacher organizations to place teachers and administrators on opposite sides of the fence, both the teacher and the principal are managers. The teacher is a middle level manager as is the principal. Educators rightly resist identifying schools and factories as identical but there are management principles that can be applied to both situations.

Supervision or evaluation of teachers by the principal often focuses on the degree to which the teacher exhibits the characteristics which are, more often than not, found to be associated with "effective schools." The assumption is that if teachers do certain things student learning will improve. This might be the best we could do if we could not measure student learning. With well thought out objectives and the appropriate objective based tests, it is possible today to quite accurately measure student achievement and, more important, achievement trends.

One other drawback to applying a single supervisory/evaluative model to the principal/teacher situation is that the process is so time consuming. Further, it is obvious that the situations are so different that one model cannot be better than a compromise with what should be done. Does it make sense to urge teachers to individualize instruction while the principal deals with every teacher the same way?

This is a proposal to match supervisory style with the situation.
There are four effective styles of supervision.
They are:

1. Clinical supervision. This refers to a process which includes several components. The first is a presupervisory conference between the principal and the teacher to be supervised. During this meeting the teacher will explain what his/her objectives are for the lesson to be observed. The teacher is asked to explain what teaching strategies are to be employed and what student outcomes are to be expected. The supervisor either volunteers, or is asked, to help the teacher during the observation to record evidences of student learning to be discussed later.

   The observation follows. After the observation, which should be for all or most of a lesson, the principal and the teacher plan for a post observation conference. The principal plans what to say to be most helpful to the teacher while the teacher reflects on the lesson and plans what comments to make to the supervisor and what questions to ask.

   After all this is accomplished the principal writes up what happened throughout the process and what to be concerned about in future supervisory visits.

2. Cooperative professional development.* This describes a process in which one or two experienced master teachers are teamed with an inexperienced teacher to work together to improve each other's teaching. The team members are frequently present in each other's classroom to observe one another. There are structured opportunities to share ideas for improving instruction but the master teachers are mainly serving as models for the inexperienced teacher. This is often called a collegial model.

3. Self-directed development. This is a process in which the principal helps an experienced teacher set short and long term goals in terms of student achievement. The teacher is given positive reinforcement for each small goal achieved by the principal. The principal spends time in helping the teacher acquire resources needed to achieve his/her goals.

4. Administrative monitoring. This is a process in which the principal does little more than acquire resources requested by the teacher. Student achievement is monitored and as long as the teacher is managing to show improvement in student learning, or high achievement standards are maintained, little observation time is scheduled. Test data is supplemented with short, unscheduled classroom visits to monitor student performance not measured on tests.

*This term, as are the other terms used to describe supervisory styles, are from: Glatthorn, Allan A. Differentiated Supervision. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Washington, D.C., 1984.

If one accepts that no one best supervisory style exists for all situations, the question arises "How does one best match supervisory style with the situation?" Following are descriptions of four categories of teachers that each call for one of the supervisory styles listed above:

1. The unfocused worker. This is a "teacher" whom we wish did not work in our schools. He/she does not plan lessons systematically, does not have a clear set of objectives for each lesson and is using the teaching job and the accompanying salary to fulfill some need elsewhere.

   These persons need all the elements of clinical supervision and thorough documentation of all aspects of the supervisory process should be maintained. These teachers will either improve as a result of clinical supervision or combination of poor student achievement records and the supervisory efforts will provide the needed documentation to terminate them.

2. The second category of teacher includes those teachers who are highly motivated to teach but who lack the expertise in teaching that usually comes with experience. Most beginning teachers are in this category. They are willing but unable to function without considerable direction. This type of teacher should become a member of a cooperative professional development team. By observing master teachers and by the coaching of master teachers, this type of teacher will develop expertise and his/her students' achievement will improve.

3. This category of teacher can best be described as the "jaded teacher." The term "teacher burnout" has been used to describe a teacher who has the competency to teach well but who is no longer motivated or willing to put forth the effort required to guide his/her students to high achievement levels. Enthusiasm is an elusive but recognizable attribute of all teachers who have high achieving students. Enthusiasm for an activity can only be maintained over time if one believes that he/she can get better at the activity. Teachers who fall in this category need the supervisory style described in number three above. Short and longer term goals with a feedback mechanism can be invigorating if the resources needed to reach the goals are not too difficult to obtain. Feedback on results is the most powerful motivator we know of.

4. The competent teacher is one who is consistently motivated and who guides his/her students to a high level of achievement. These teachers need little direct supervision. The leadership style called "administrative monitoring" describes a good match between the competent teacher and the supervisor.

Another very important concept must be understood to use situational supervision effectively. The foregoing description of teacher behavior are task relevant, that is, a teacher may be in level four in his/her classroom but may be at a considerably lower level as a faculty study group chairperson. The supervisor should always attempt to match the supervisory style to the person being supervised and to the task that person has been assigned.

The whole concept of situational supervision is consistent with the concept of situational leadership which has become so prevalent in

business largely through the efforts of Dr. Kenneth Blanchard, co-author of The One Minute Manager.

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